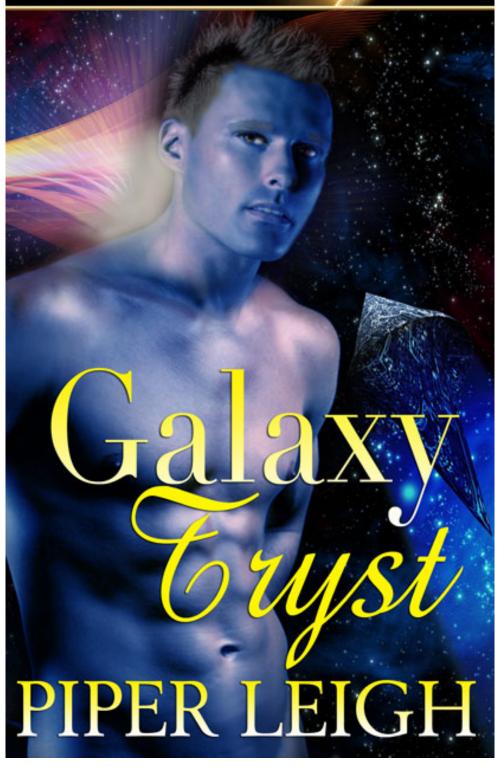
Ellora's Cave FEEN



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Galaxy Tryst

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GALAXY TRYST

Piper Leigh

Chapter One

My course of action became clear once I tied him to the bed.

It all started innocently enough. I was supposed to meet some friends at a hot new bar, but the entire evening conspired against me. The trendy bar had a huge line winding from the velvet rope all the way down the block. And then the skies opened, drenching my perfectly constructed 'do and plastering my gelled hair to my head in a sticky mess. Of course it also ruined my new suede outfit, and...

Where was I? Oh yeah, the guy roped to my bed. Well, not *roped* exactly—more like tied securely with my black lace stockings.

Oh, and did I mention he was blue?

But I digress...

My so-called friends had scattered as soon as the first raindrop fell, leaving me all alone on the street. It seemed all the available cabs had fled at the first sign of rain as well. I had resigned myself to hoofing it to the nearest subway when I saw the blue man walking toward me out of the teeming rain.

Now I have to admit in the club district, on a Saturday night, you can see almost anything. So at first I didn't even give the guy a second glance. *Apparently the circus is in town*, I thought as he passed by. It was only as I was staring at his retreating blue butt that I realized he was completely naked. No, that's no body stocking, I mused. The guy really was nakers.

And a fine blue butt he had.

Sensing my scrutiny, he turned around and focused silver eyes on me. Short hair a shade darker than his eyes was slicked to his head by the rain. Okay, now it *is* unusual to see a naked guy in blue body paint and wearing a silver wig and silver contacts, even in the bar district, but I still wasn't getting the full picture.

"Hey," I called when he continued to stare at me. "Um, aren't you just a little cold like that?" I mean, it was pouring rain and he was, well...uncovered.

For another moment he just eyed me with those disconcerting lenses and then he opened his mouth and said, "Uck nat gluck?"

At least I think it was a question. Didn't matter really. By now rain had soaked through my coat and shoes. Naked guy or not, I was going home to central heating and my dryer.

"Okay, whatever," I answered. I turned to leave.

A surprisingly strong grip seized me. I glanced down at the blue hand on my arm, effectively immobilizing me. If that was body paint, I reasoned, shouldn't it be running with all the water pouring from the sky?

I tried to pull myself away and failed.

"Ugh nak rut."

"Okay, fun's over buddy. Let go of me or I'm screaming for a cop!"

"Nag naff," he said.

I opened my mouth to holler. And then he kissed me.

Half my scream was absorbed by his mouth. I struggled but his other blue arm came up around me, crushing me against him.

I wiggled some more, to no avail. Then I tried to bite at his lips but he forced his tongue into my mouth, efficiently silencing me.

Getting really mad now, I struggled harder. Then his tongue moved with such a seductive stroke, it stole my thoughts. He tasted a little like vanilla. He smelled of some unfamiliar spice. In spite of standing in the icy rain, his body felt warm against mine. Really warm, like his tongue, which was creating delightful sensations inside my mouth.

For a moment I could only stand there while his tongue stroked the sensitive recesses of my mouth, giving me a preview of what he could possibly do to other parts

of my body. Each caress sent little tingles down my spine, dragging my thoughts to warm and sweaty things that had nothing to do with standing in the cold rain.

I've been kissed before. Gentle kisses, passionate kisses, wet, slimy kisses—but never, ever anything like this.

Part of me wanted to run and part of me really wanted to see what else he would do. After all, that was what I'd come out here in the rain for...to meet guys. Not exactly blue guys, but guys nonetheless.

Okay, I decided. One more kiss.

Then I'd get the heck out of the rain. Just my luck he decided to stop there.

He pulled back and stared at me for the first time somewhat lucidly. He held me in that gaze for a very long moment while he visibly struggled for the right words. And then he said in perfect but strangely accented English, "Help me."

I almost did run then. I mean, all I'd wanted was a good time and here I was in the pouring rain with some strange blue guy with silver contacts spouting gibberish. I didn't want to help him. I wanted to go home and forget the whole ill-fated evening. Still, there was something in the depths of those strange eyes that made me stop.

Desperation, pure and raw, swirled within them. "Help me," he whispered again. Like they were the only two words he knew.

Now, I'm not in the habit of taking strange men home. Especially men *this* strange. But something in the rough tone of his voice and the desperation in his eyes made me reconsider.

"Help you how?" I asked finally.

To which he replied, "Guck not mat."

"Great." I looked him up and down again. "This is a joke, right? Nancy and Tony put you up to this."

He cocked his head to the side. Rain dripped off his nose and ran down his neck, beading on his very muscular chest. If that blue stuff was paint, I thought, it's not coming off.

"No joke," he said finally. Then a whole string of words that sounded like, "*Unk yak naft dar*." He gave me another of those odd, beseeching looks. "Help."

I sighed. I really, really wanted to be home and dry. I studied him some more. He couldn't be that dangerous, I reasoned. I mean, there was absolutely no place he could be hiding a weapon. Not any place I wanted to know about in any case. And if he turned out to be a total lunatic I could at least call 9-1-1.

"Help," I repeated. "Okay."

No way he'd be getting on the subway like that. I motioned for him to follow me down a few blocks and out of the club district, where at least we'd be more likely to get a cab.

The rain picked up until I could barely see in front of me. After what seemed like forever, I saw lights coming toward us. Squinting into the mist, I thought I saw a light on top of the car. I raised my hand and prayed it was a cab.

The taxi pulled up to the curb, sending up a plume of water that only drenched us further. I opened the door and motioned for the blue man to get in. I climbed in behind him.

The driver gave us an odd look but didn't say anything. I gave him an address a couple blocks away from where I lived. The last thing I wanted was for the cab company to know where they'd dropped a blue guy off.

When we pulled up in front of the house number I'd given, I paid the driver and we got out into the rain. The blue man gave me a questioning look.

"Gunk?"

"Not far," I told him and motioned for him to follow me down the street. I sincerely hoped none of my neighbors were looking out their windows. Probably not, I thought,

glancing up at the sky. Anyone with half an ounce of sense would be inside with the drapes shut and a roaring fire going.

Luckily no one was peering through their blinds when we arrived. We walked around the corner and went in through the back door anyway—the one without video surveillance, just in case—and I herded him up the back stairs. Only three flights. I'd rather have taken the elevator than the frigid stairway, but I didn't want company.

The blue man climbed the stairs in silence, only stopping to glance at me questioningly a couple times. He didn't leave any blue footprints. Whatever he'd painted himself with, it was good stuff.

Okay, I thought. I'll get him inside, loan him a pair of sweats and some flip-flops and get him out of there. I opened the door and ushered him inside before telling him to wait on the doormat while I searched for a towel. A ratty, *old* towel that I wouldn't mind getting blue paint on.

Finding the towel, I returned and gave it to him, miming for him to dry himself and wrap it around his waist. He quickly obeyed. The azure color didn't come off on the towel either, I realized.

Wandering into the bedroom, I changed into a pair of sweats and wrapped my dripping hair in a towel. I searched through my drawers until I found a large shirt and a pair of sweats that had once belonged to an old boyfriend. I brought them back to the blue man, who was still standing on my doormat and gazing around my apartment with some interest.

"Here." I held out the clothes.

He tilted his head to the side again. "Naft gan."

I shook my head. "I don't understand." I practiced my miming skills again, this time instructing how to put the clothes on. He glanced at them doubtfully then tilted his head again. "Naft nat gunk." He slapped the side of his head. "Naft—" Another whack upside the head.

I edged away, trying to reach the cordless phone to make that 9-1-1 call.

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He hit himself again then said succinctly, "Thank you." Smiling, he reached out for the clothes.

"You're welcome," I said, moving just close enough to hand them over before stepping back out of reach.

"I won't hurt you." He sounded sincere.

"I think I'll be the judge of that," I replied.

He shrugged then. I turned away while he put on the sweats. I don't know why I did that. I'd been looking at him buck naked all night, but for some reason the act of dressing seemed more intimate.

I heard the rustle of cloth and waited a beat before turning around to find him dressed. I vaguely hoped he wasn't rubbing that blue stuff off on the inside of the clothes before catching myself. *Doesn't matter*, I decided. The old boyfriend wouldn't be coming back. I think I'd made the fact that he wasn't welcome quite clear.

"Better," the blue man said. He was looking around my apartment again, as if he found everything in it intensely interesting. Couldn't figure out exactly what he found so fascinating. I'm not rich by any means. In fact, most of the time I just get by. I don't have any furniture that wasn't someone else's castoffs or from a discount store. It all seems to work in a shabby-chic kind of way, but was definitely nothing's fancy.

"What's with the blue stuff?" I asked. Now that I knew he apparently spoke English, I figured I should find out.

"Blooo," he repeated. He tapped the side of his head again. His eyes unfocussed for a moment, like he was listening to something on the inside of his skull, then he smiled. "Blue?"

I nodded.

"My skin," he said, like that explained everything.

"Why is your skin blue?"

"Why is yours white?"

"Because...that's what color it is..."

"Yes."

"Yes...what?"

"Yes, that's what color my skin is," he responded proudly.

Oh great. A maniac after all.

"You're trying to tell me your skin is naturally blue?" I asked sarcastically.

He nodded, like it ought to be obvious. Guess it was, in a maniacal kind of way.

"You're telling me you were born blue?"

"Yes!" He seemed inordinately pleased about that.

"Right. And I'm not supposed to find that unusual."

The blue guy was still standing on my doormat, his muscular body filling out my ex's sweats.

"Not unusual where I come from."

Okay, I'd play along. "And where might that be?"

He pointed toward the ceiling.

"Upstairs?"

He frowned, tapped his head again and then smiled. "No, from the sky."

"The sky?" *Enough*, I decided, inching again toward the cordless phone and the 9-1-1 call that would bring the men in white coats, or at least the paramedics with the tranquilizers and a stretcher. "You're trying to tell me you're from another planet?"

He said "Yes!" again, like it was the only word he knew. Then as if to clarify it all, "Naft don kad."

"What's with the gibberish?"

Again that unfocussed gaze. "My language."

"Okay." Two more seconds and I was making that call. "And that kiss in the street, in the rain?"

"Greeting."

"That was some greeting!"

"Wrong greeting?"

I nodded. "It was a little overly familiar."

To that he blushed, or at least I think that's what it was because he darkened to a deeper blue. "But I thought..."

"Thought what?"

"That is how Earthlings greet each other?"

Earthlings? Did anyone ever use that term?

"Only Earthlings who know each other very well."

He said, "Oh." And deepened to an even darker shade of blue.

For a moment silence reigned in the apartment, broken only by the hiss of the heating system.

"I have...studied broadcasts," he said then. "Thought that is how Earth people greet each other. I...apologize if I have been...overly familiar."

I was buying into it all, I realized. At that moment I wasn't sure which of us was crazier. Him for saying it or me for listening. Still, he didn't seem dangerous.

I sighed. "Okay, apology accepted. I motioned to the couch by the window. "Come on in then."

For safety's sake, I picked up the cordless phone and took it with me.

He stepped into my living room and looked around. Hesitantly, he sat on the edge of the couch. I sat down beside him.

"You do realize this is a little hard to believe."

"Hard to believe," he repeated. "Yes."

"On Earth, people who claim to be from other planets are usually locked up in institutions for the insane."

Piper Leigh

He cocked his head again.

"Why do you keep doing that?"

"Accessing translator," he confessed. Then, "Please don't lock me up. Really do need your help."

Great. Now he was going to ask me for money to get back to his planet.

"What kind of help?"

"Need to hide."

"Hide from whom?"

"From other aliens."

Okay, no money. He just wanted me to smuggle arms or something.

I gave him my most skeptical glare. "You do realize that's even harder to believe."

"Yes."

"You want me to believe you're from another planet and you what...crash-landed here while fleeing some kind of warmongering alien race?" I knew how it went. I'd seen the odd science fiction flick.

His expression brightened at that. "Yes! Fleeing. Trying to get back to... Ratt Naft Mutt. Made emergency landing. Transmitter damaged, clothes caught fire. Need to hide. Find help."

"I can't help you get to *Ratt Naft Mutt.*" I stumbled over the unfamiliar syllables.

"And I can't help you with the warmongering aliens either."

"Hide," he repeated.

"You're kind of hard to hide, being blue and all." If he truly was from another world, I realized I must look as strange to him as he did to me. For the first time I wondered what he thought of my blonde hair and green eyes and much shorter stature, but he was just glancing around my apartment as if looking for a place to conceal himself.

"Hide here." He gave me a wide smile. It was a nice smile, I decided, blue guy or not. Still, what he was asking...

"I'm not sure that's a good idea."

"No kiss again."

"That doesn't reassure me much." Because I didn't believe for one minute that he was a lost alien. After all, I'd seen his...equipment...and it sure looked human enough to me. He could just be some maniac who'd gotten himself mixed up in something dangerous and was trying to find a place to hide while it all blew over. The last thing I wanted was for whoever was after him to come after *me*.

And God help me, despite what I'd said, I really did want him to kiss me again.

"Hide," he implored with such desperation it melted my resolve.

"Okay. But whatever's after you, it better not come here."

"Won't find here." He sounded remarkably sure of that. I hoped he was right.

I glanced at the clock, shocked to realize how late it had gotten. We'd wasted more time talking and looking for a cab than I'd thought. "Look, I'm tired now. We should sleep." Oh Lord, I hoped he didn't realize how suggestive that sounded.

"Sleep," he repeated and tapped his head again. "Oh yes, sleep."

"You do rest, don't you?" I purposely used another word, one without sexual connotations.

"Rest, yes."

"Fine." I stood up, yawning dramatically. "You rest here." I pointed to the couch. "I'll get you a blanket and a pillow."

He took the pillow and the blanket gratefully but remained sitting upright on the couch. I glanced at him and shrugged. He could very well sleep sitting up for all I cared. I refused to indulge his fantasy that he came from another star.

My bedroom door didn't lock. I snatched up my soaking purse and strode into the room. I dumped the dirty clothes off the chair beside my bed then shoved the chair beneath the door. Still clothed in the sweats I'd put on earlier, I climbed into bed and, to my surprise, abruptly fell asleep.

I dreamed. I knew it was a dream because it had that fuzzy-edged quality my dreams often have. The blue man kissed me, like he had in the street, only it wasn't raining. We sat on a hill covered in shiny black grass. Beside us, farther up the rise, a triangular building crouched on the horizon. A fat red sun shone dimly down on us, its warmth soothing.

"Ratt Natt Muck?" I asked, pulling away and looking around.

"Naft Mutt," he corrected, like that should mean something to me.

He pulled me back into his embrace. Silver eyes studied my face. For a moment he seemed undecided and then he smiled that wide, friendly smile. I smiled back. He closed the distance and kissed me thoroughly. His tongue moved within my mouth, savoring every crevice with slow, sensuous movements. I'd never been a big fan of tongue, but with the way he used his, I was about to become a convert. I kissed him back, tasting the unique, spicy flavor of him, exploring. He moaned low in his throat.

He gently eased us onto our sides on the soft grass and searched for the hem of my hoodie, running a hand up underneath. I leaned into him, feeling the warmth of his questing fingers. His body temperature seemed higher than mine, or maybe it was just the dream...

Dream, I repeated like a mantra. Just a dream. It didn't matter what happened. I didn't really believe he came from Ran Dat Guck or whatever. I didn't believe any of it. Still, I didn't want to interrupt the most interesting dream I'd had in a long time.

His fingers trailed over my rib cage. Every brush of those long, tapered fingers drove my desire higher. His hand found my breast and he ran his fingers over it lightly, and I sighed at the touch of those feathersoft caresses that sent tingles all the way to the cleft of my sex. For an alien—okay, so maybe in the dream I was willing to accept his story about being from another planet—he sure knew what he was doing. His fingers

found my nipple and tweaked it to a taut peak. I moaned loudly. I didn't usually make sounds like that either. The walls in my apartment were thin. But in my dream I just didn't care.

Exploring further, his palm closed over my entire breast and he closed his fingers, gently kneading. I bit back a moan. I glanced down, realizing that in that magical way of dreams I was still clothed but he was naked, the way I'd found him. I decided that two could play this game—and reached down.

He jerked when my hand closed around his erect cock. He left no doubt that he wanted me. Already he was rock hard and far bigger than I'd expected. His fingers stilled on my breast, then began another exploration, sliding down my rib cage to the waistband of my pants. His warm hand slid under the fabric, continuing down over my belly to the juncture of my thighs. I gasped as his fingers unerringly found my clit.

"Ah, so it's true," he murmured.

I collected my thoughts enough to ask, "What's true?"

"What they say about Earth women."

"What do they say?"

Whatever he might have answered got lost in my loud groan as his fingers slid over that tender bud. I felt a surge of wetness as he found just the right spot and began to stroke me gently. I bucked against him then retaliated with an assault of my own, tightening my grip on his cock and stroking faster. Whatever he thought of Earth women, I seemed to please him because his breathing came more rapidly. I glanced up to see his silver eyes turn smoky gray with desire.

His fingers continued to work their magic on me, using my own wetness to help him slide inside and tease me further. He was really getting the hang of it now, I thought, as my whole body clenched, reaching for that elusive shock of pleasure that would send me over the edge. He intuitively sensed what I needed, increasing his pace.

I reciprocated and he bucked against me, murmuring something guttural in his own language. I answered with an incoherent moan of my own.

Pleasure hit like a tsunami. I cried out, pushing hard against his hand. His own cries echoed in my ears...

And then I was sitting straight up in bed, all sweaty and hot, my hands clenched in the blankets. And quite obviously alone.

Looking wildly around, I noted the chair still sat securely beneath the door handle where I'd left it. He hadn't been in my room. It was only a dream. A very intimate dream, yet still just a dream.

I realized that during the strange events of the evening we hadn't even asked each other's names. If blue men from *Nafta Rutt had* names. I glanced again at the door, hoping he hadn't heard my cries—and hoping desperately that, if he had, he hadn't guessed their meaning.

Feeling oddly embarrassed, I pulled the covers up higher and slept.

Chapter Two

I awoke to the afternoon sun streaming through the curtains and the smell of coffee brewing. After that strange, erotic dream, I'd slept deeply and far later than I'd intended. Cautiously, I took the chair from beneath the door and wandered into the kitchen.

The blue man stood in the center of my tiny galley kitchen surveying the contents of my cupboard. Alien or not, he'd figured out how to use the coffeemaker. Toast was presently burning in my toaster, and eggs and other unidentified frying objects were cooking in what smelled like a very odd combination of spices on my stove.

"Ah...hi."

He jumped at my greeting. Then he motioned to the stove and beamed with pride. "Break-fast!"

"Breakfast," I agreed, even though I never ate that much for breakfast and it smelled revolting, but I didn't want to be the one to destroy the hopeful look in his eyes.

I took the coffee he offered and winced. It was scalding hot and loaded with sugar. I drank it black as a habit, needing the caffeine most of the time but not the calories. Still, he was looking at me obviously so happy with his creation, I didn't want to ruin the moment for him.

Vestiges of the dream wafted through my memory. I glanced down into my coffee, hoping to cover my rising blush with the rising steam. When I looked up he caught my eye. By the expression on his face, I could swear that he knew every bit of what had happened in my dream. I looked away.

He dumped a couple of overcooked eggs and several slices of burnt toast on my plate.

"Breakfast," he said again, mimicking my pronunciation.

"Um, thanks."

While he turned back to the stove, I studied him. His hair was wet, like he'd been in the shower. And if he had, whatever the blue stuff was, it hadn't come off there any more than it had in the rain. Crazy thoughts rushed through my mind. He couldn't really be from an alien planet, could he? I hadn't just spent the might with a lunatic in my apartment, had I?

Nothing seemed out of place, I thought, glancing around. Not that I owned much to take. He appeared grateful for my hospitality. I really didn't know what to make of it all.

Now that I'd been served, he hesitated, holding an empty plate as though he was afraid to take my food without asking first.

I indicated the space across from me. "Breakfast?"

Sighing with relief, he heaped his plate and slid into the chair across from me.

In fascination, I watched as he shoveled an incredible amount of food into his mouth. Catching my horrified glance, he slowed down a bit. "Hungry," he said, as if that explained it all.

"Obviously," I agreed.

I waited until he'd finished and pushed his plate away. He reached for my dishes, but I grasped his blue wrist. "Tell me again about *Muck Not Ran*," I said.

"Ratt Naft Mutt," he corrected.

"Whatever."

He sighed then, and I wondered if he'd told his story to others. Maybe I was the first to listen. "Lost. Ship damaged. Need to hide. Need to find a way back to *Ratt Naft Mutt.*"

I got up from the table and walked to the ancient laptop I left plugged in on the desk in the corner of my living room. "Show me then. Show me *Ratt Naft Mutt.*"

Giving me a hesitant look, he opened the laptop. For an alien, he seemed competent enough with Earthly computers. He tapped a few commands then turned the machine to face me. I noted he'd called up a star map from some astronomy site. He pointed to a reddish star. "Ratt Naft Mutt."

Now, I'm no fool. He could have been pointing at anything. It didn't necessarily mean he knew what he was looking at.

I stared at the screen. The tiny star glowed back at me. Was it possible that he came from that faraway place? It really didn't seem plausible.

"Okay, I'll play along." I thought about the blue stuff that didn't come off in the rain or the shower.

Blue man tapped some more keys. "Come from here." He traced an invisible line with his finger. "Here where going." He indicated a new trajectory with the tip of one blue finger and tapped the screen for emphasis. "Here where ended up." He pointed to a tiny yellow star way off on the far side of the screen. I tried to reconcile those vast distances in my mind and failed.

I attempted to imagine what it would be like to travel so far, to be away from everything familiar, but my mind just couldn't grasp it. I yanked my thoughts back. It couldn't—just *couldn't*—be true, because that would mean that we weren't alone in the universe, that all around us in the starry skies were people not so different from us.

And apparently, just like us, some of them weren't so friendly.

"What about the aliens you were fleeing from?"

His face darkened to a deeper blue at that. I wondered how, if it was paint, he could blush like that. And not for the first time, I had the uncanny thought that he might be telling the truth, whether my brain could accept it or not.

"Gatt Catt Kan." He spat the words like a curse. He tapped some more keys. The display changed. New stars appeared.

"Gatt what?"

"Gatt Catt Kan," he repeated and pointed to a blue star all alone at the edge of the star map. He tapped the side of his head and considered whatever the inside of his brain was telling him. "Evil."

"You're trying to tell me that the *Gatt* people are evil?"

"Evil," he said again. "Want to control the whole galaxy."

That sure didn't sound good. "Can they come here?"

He hesitated at that, like there was something he really didn't want to tell me. "Earth good place to hide," he said after a moment. "Not on the official trade routes."

"There are trade routes in outer space?" I didn't—really, really didn't—want to believe that. It was hard enough to believe that aliens might be sitting on planets like ours around other stars, but that they might also be zinging back and forth through space just outside our solar system was too scary to contemplate. Maybe they weren't just zinging around *outside* the solar system either. I thought about all the UFO sightings that had cropped up over the years. Could it be that some of them were blue man's friends cruising just off the beaten path?

"How did these Gatt Catt Kan get you, anyway?"

"Ship damaged. Trying to make repairs. Gatt shot at me."

"So you crash-landed on Earth?"

He nodded. "Emergency landing."

"So they might have followed you here."

Blue man shook his head. "Not followed."

Sure, I thought, but I didn't say it. One thing was certain. I wasn't going to be hiding him very long. As soon as I got dressed, I was going to find a nice mental institution or jail in which to hide the blue man. That way, when the marauders from *Gatt Catt Kan* came shooting through the sky, they wouldn't be visiting my place.

It occurred to me suddenly that, with all this talk about aliens and other stars, we still hadn't exchanged names. I might need it...to tell the authorities.

"So, do you have a name?"

He looked startled. Perhaps, like me, he was surprised that we hadn't even talked about names yet. He tapped his chest. "Starnamackdanajubloo."

Oh. Sorry I asked. I tried pronouncing it the way he had and failed. "How about 'Blue' for short?"

He seemed okay with that.

"My name's Candace."

"Can-dice," he repeated.

I smiled. "Close enough." For once I felt relieved after an introduction—he likely didn't know the derivative I so loathed. Anything was better than Candy.

Blue gave me what could only be interpreted as a bow. I glanced at the cupboards he'd all but emptied in his attempt to make breakfast. "I need to do some shopping. Buy more food."

He nodded, like that was a good thing to do. If he kept cooking like he had at breakfast, he was going to eat me out of house and home. While I was out, I could make some inquiries about what to do with my unwanted blue houseguest.

I changed into a worn pair of jeans and a ragged hoodie then put on some lipstick and my favorite pair of hoop earrings. Okay, that would have to do, I mused. The cab last night had used up the last of my cash, so I pocketed my credit card and headed for the grocery store.

Out in the bright sunlight, the whole thing seemed all the more ludicrous. There were no little blue men from Mars or anywhere else. There were no *Ratt Natt Guck* thingies. I'd had a weird Saturday night and when I got back from the store with my credit card a few bucks heavier, well...blue man would be gone. It was as simple as that.

I managed to delude myself about that for several more minutes until the little hairs on the back of my neck stood up at attention all at once. I glanced behind me, trying to look nonchalant, refusing to give in to any more weirdness, no matter what. Bright sunlight blazed overhead, last night's rain a distant memory except for the puddles that hadn't quite evaporated. Few people stirred on the street. No blue men, at least.

That's when I saw the inky black shadow creeping down the street.

I froze, watching as the shadow absorbed the sunlight, wringing every bit of brightness out of its path. For several moments I could only stand there and stare. It looked deceptively like a cloud had covered the sun, but not a wisp marred the blindingly blue sky.

Visceral fear crept up my throat like a scream. I bolted down the last block, through the small market's doors and raced down an aisle to the back of the store. Wedged into the recess between the loading dock doors and the dairy department, I peered around the corner and glanced back toward the door in time to see a shadow cross the street, heading toward the store. It drifted across the sidewalk, seeming to scan the doorways, undulating, like it was searching for something and not finding it. I noticed that people shivered as they passed it, looking nervously over their shoulders. A few glanced at the sky then shook their heads and continued on.

Could this be the *Gatt Catt Kan* Blue was talking about? His words echoed in my mind. They'd shot at him, or so he said. He'd also insisted he hadn't been followed.

Not sure whether they could pick up cellular phone signals, I hesitated to use my mobile phone. Would Blue even know how to answer the phone? He'd figured out my computer with no problem, I remembered. For some reason that made me feel worse. Who were these beings who had come to our planet? They seemed to have all our secrets figured out and we didn't even know they existed.

In horror, I watched as the sweeping darkness dulled the street, eating up the sidewalk, inching closer to the market where I was hiding. For several agonizing moments, it lingered by the store's automatic doors. All it needed was someone to trip the sensor and give it access. I sunk back deeper into the recess beside the docking bay

doors and held my breath. A quick glance at the cashiers in my line of sight showed long lines. Everyone seemed to have full grocery carts.

Except for the Express Desk.

"No," I prayed, chanting quietly. "No, no, no!"

The cashier put the last item in a customer's bag. Thankfully the blonde female rummaged in her purse and then again in her wallet, looking for her credit card and holding the line up further as the cashier waited for a signature. I shot another furtive glance toward the darkness puddled in the doorway.

The cashier handed the customer her receipt. She tossed it in her bag and walked toward the doors.

"No!" I squeaked.

I huddled farther into the recess, cloaking myself in shadow and prepared for that strange darkness to begin wafting down the aisle toward me.

But just at that second, the sky outside seemed to brighten. I inched forward a bit and looked out just in time to see the edge of the shadow drifting down the street and sunshine streaming down the short aisle.

Tension drained out of me, along with all my energy. I wanted to run home right away and hole myself up in my cramped apartment and never come out. Thanks to Blue, there was no food left in the place. And if that strange darkness really was the *Gutt Rack Nutt* or whatever, then we were going to need some fortifications. I looked back at the street and swallowed hard. I really didn't want to go out there just yet, anyway.

Instead I took a hasty tour of the grocery store, grabbing up cereal bars, canned goods and baking supplies, not that I really knew what to do with those anyway but in case we were stuck inside, I wanted to be prepared. I signed the credit card receipt, scarcely wincing at the humongous charge, and dashed home.

Blue was sitting in front of my television when I barreled through the door.

I dumped the groceries unceremoniously on the kitchen floor and dashed back into the living room to close the blinds. Grabbing the TV remote, I turned off the set.

Standing in front of it, I demanded, "Tell me again about the Gack Can Ratt!"

His eyes narrowed. He stood up. "Gatt Catt Kan?"

"Yeah, those guys."

"Gatt Catt Kan...here?" he asked feverously, looking around.

"I don't know."

"What did you see, Can-dice?"

"Okay, don't think I'm crazy or anything," I began, then realized I was talking to a blue man in my living room. "I was on the way to the store, and I saw this weird shadow. It kind of followed me down the street until I hid in the market. Strangely, there wasn't a cloud in the sky. The shadow didn't do anything to me, it just kind of swept over the street..." I let the sentence trail off.

Blue cast a nervous glance at the shuttered windows. "Shadow follow you home?"

"No, I waited until it moved on. I wasn't sure if it was after me particularly, but it seemed to be looking for something or someone. And I just had this weird scary feeling, like if it found me...well, something awful would happen."

"Something awful will happen," Blue repeated. "Gatt very dangerous."

"What does it do?"

"Death ray."

He didn't just say "death ray"? My mind seemed to be having trouble keeping up. I didn't want to believe that a mere shadow was capable of such a thing.

"Death ray? Like a laser?" My mind kept conjuring scenes from bad science fiction movies.

"Not laser, not actual ray exactly...but will suck out life," he clarified. Like I wanted to know that.

Galaxy Tryst

"You told me the *Gatt* hadn't followed you here!" I accused. "You let me believe I was safe!"

"Didn't follow," Blue insisted. "Must be mapping. Just looking. Searching from my last known location."

"Great," I said. "That makes me feel so much better."

Blue took my answer at face value. "I was being sarcastic," I clarified.

He tapped the side of his head then his eyes narrowed farther. "Safe with me," he said, looking oddly wounded.

Sure, I thought. I sat down hard on the sofa in the spot where he'd occupied. Okay brain, I tried to tell myself gently, there really is a blue alien in your living room. And there are other aliens after him that can kill with a death ray. My mind seemed to be taking it all in easily enough, if you discounted the shaking in my hands and knees. "Is that what they shot at you with?" I asked Blue. "That death ray thing?"

He shook his head. "Just one of their weapons."

Even better. Apparently there were more.

"Didn't you say you had a ship somewhere nearby?"

"Hidden."

"So if we could get to it, could you call your people?"

"Need parts for transmitter."

"Parts we have here on Earth?"

"Maybe."

"Okay, then. Let's go get those parts." I didn't add, so you can get out of there and take the Gatt with you.

Blue lifted a corner of the blinds and peered out. "Not safe until dark." He looked back at me, plainly worried. "Can't kill in the dark."

He came to sit beside me. He looked worried, chastened even. He'd promised me the *Gatt* hadn't followed him here. Promised that I was safe with him. And everything he'd said had turned out to be untrue.

And what on earth was I going to do with him until dark?

"Why do these *Gatt* thingies want to take over the universe?" The question just begged asking.

"Galaxy," he corrected, then shook his head. "No one knows. Why does anyone wage war?"

"Good question. I've wondered the same myself."

"Sometimes war is necessary to protect yourself," he supplied.

"Yes," I agreed. "But the rest of the time the amount of suffering never seems to outweigh the gains."

"With the *Gatt Catt Kan*, there is no choice. They pillage, they annex. They are not open to diplomatic relations of any kind."

"And now they've come here."

"Won't stay," Blue said.

"Why not?"

"Earth not considered valuable...yet."

"Thanks a bunch."

"Be thankful," he warned. "Gatt want me. Nothing more."

"Why you?"

"I..." The question seemed to make him acutely uncomfortable. "I destroyed a vital *Gatt* outpost."

I said, "Oh." And wondered for the millionth time just what exactly I had sitting there in my living room.

"So...tell me about your planet," I sighed, mostly just to change the subject to talk about something besides war and killing. And I have to admit, the idea of talking

firsthand to someone from another planet, of finding out what was really out there in the darkness, was just too good to pass up.

"Home planet is beautiful," Blue said. "Rolling black hills, yellow sky, red sun." He sighed. "Haven't been there for a long time."

"Where were you? At war?"

Another long sigh. "At war. On battle cruiser. On space stations and cold, rocky outpost planets."

"You miss home?"

He nodded and I wondered how it would feel to be away from Earth and its blue skies and green hills, trapped on Pluto or some asteroid at the edge of space. I'd miss home for certain. I'd miss my friends.

My friends! I thought suddenly. How would I ever explain this? Assuming I got out of this strange situation in one piece, I realized I'd never be able to tell them. Not if I wanted to stay out of the loony bin.

"Do you have a...a," I didn't know how to say the rest of it. "Mate," I settled on.

Blue looked startled at the question. A multitude of emotions crossed his blue face. "No," he said after a moment, his expression hardening. "*Gatt* killed her."

"Oh!" I said. "I'm so sorry."

"Long time ago."

"That's terrible." I was truly sorry I'd asked.

"Long time since I've been home, long time since I've had a mate, long time since I've done anything but fight."

I really didn't know what to say to that. "Maybe you can find somewhere else to go," I began. "A nice planet where there's no fighting."

"The galaxy will never be safe as long as there are *Gatt*." He sounded infinitely weary. "Besides," he pointed to his blue face, "not too many places in the galaxy where I can fit in."

"That's probably true. You kind of stand out here."

He smiled at that, his even white teeth contrasting with his blue skin. I had to admit that smile appealed to me. Blue leaned over, closing the distance between us.

Surprising even myself, I didn't back away. His warm lips covered mine.

He gave me a chaste yet seductive kiss then pulled away. "Thank you, Can-dice. For your understanding, for your...hospitality."

"You're welcome," I began, ready to insist that my hospitality only went so far, but he brought those shockingly soft lips closer once more. They moved against my mouth, gently demanding entrance. I opened my lips, let him kiss me the way he wanted. He tasted strange, like nothing I could name, and yet not unpleasant. Wherever he was from, women couldn't be so different than they were here. His sensuous movements spoke of confidence and experience. He sure could kiss. And it had been awhile since I'd been kissed like that.

Just like in the dream, his warm fingers sought the hem of my sweatshirt as he pushed me back against the couch pillows. I ran my own hand down the hard muscles of his back, marveling at how alien he seemed and yet how familiar. My fingers found the waistband of his sweats and continued downward over his taut buttocks. His hand tormented me by sliding up the back of my shirt, centering in on the clasp of my bra.

That seemed to halt him in his tracks, yet he didn't stop those long, slow strokes of his tongue. I laughed against his mouth as his fingers explored the clasp mechanism, trying to figure out how to get past it. Obviously women from *Ratt Naft Mutt* didn't wear such things. He answered with an amused yet frustrated groan as my hand slid even farther downward, caressing the hard roundness of his butt.

Frustration must have fueled his efforts, because after a moment the clasp gave. He caressed my back then followed the two sides of the bra around to the front. His warm fingers slid beneath the lacy fabric.

"Ah," he murmured.

He began to pull the lingerie down, but the sleeves of my sweatshirt hindered him.

He pulled his mouth away. "Let me see you, Can-dice."

"No fair," I said. "I want to see you too."

At that he laughed. "Seen all there is to see."

"That was last night. It was dark." No way was he going to have all the fun, I decided. If I was going to make first contact with an alien species, I decided it was going to be an equal-opportunity prospect.

He obliged by standing and pulling off his shirt then stripping off the sweats until he stood before me much as I'd seen him last night...only not. Last night I'd been too mortified that he really might be a crazy, naked-yet-human guy, I really hadn't taken too much of a look.

Long enough of a look to dream about it, my conscience snickered.

Okay, I told my perverted mind, long enough for my subconscious to extrapolate. Now I *really* looked.

Broad shoulders tapered to narrow hips. His chest was muscular. The kind of muscles you get with hard work, not from a gym, I mused. I didn't care for those overmuscled gym-types. His thighs also showed evidence of muscle built up from years of physical activity. For a guy who professed to have spent the past few years on a spaceship, he was in great shape.

Blue had strong hands and long, tapered fingers. Right now those hands were bunched against his hips, waiting for me to finish my perusal. My gaze dropped to where I'd tried to avoid looking last night...

Good Heavens and all the stars above! No man ought to be so well blessed, I thought as my eyes centered on his erect cock. Blue skin or not, the effect was purely male. Primal and purely male.

Whatever he saw in my gaze, it seemed to please him because he raised one light blue eyebrow. "Like what you see?" "Yeah," I managed to grind out. My breath caught in my throat. I wanted him, blue man or not.

"Good," he said, and reached for me, pulling me up and grasping my hips to undo the button of my jeans and slide the zipper down. Where he'd learned to do that, I had no idea.

I didn't know if they had jeans or buttons or zippers where he came from, but he'd obviously heard and observed enough about Earth women to have misconceptions. Misconceptions I was furthering, I realized, and decided I didn't care.

He tossed my jeans on the pile he'd made of his clothing and reached for the hem of my sweatshirt. Gently, he disengaged my arms, pulling them smoothly from the sleeves and then sliding the straps of my bra down. He added the sweatshirt and bra to the growing pile of clothes. I faced him, clad only in my thong. His gray gaze drifted downward to where I was covered only by the slip of beige lace. He smiled.

"Do women where you come from have clothes like these?" I couldn't help asking. I really didn't want to know about women on *Natt Rack* whatever, but still curiosity burned.

"Oh no," he said in appreciation as he studied my lace thong, the only barrier now between us. "Nothing like this."

More questions crowded my mind. What were women like on his planet? What were other males of his kind like? What kinds of relationships did men and women have there? But my thoughts scattered like grains of sand on the wind when he hooked his thumbs beneath the lace and knelt to pull it down.

I gripped his shoulder for support as I stepped out of my thong and straightened. He stood up as well and I noticed for the first time just how much taller he was. Taller, broader and looking every bit the warrior he said he was.

"Where do humans do...this kind of thing?" he asked hesitantly, as if he was embarrassed to ask.

"Um..." I pointed down the hall and tried not to sound as embarrassed as I felt. "Usually in the bedroom, but sometimes...well, other places."

"Other places," he mused in that deep, resonant voice of his. Still, he followed me down the hall without complaint.

Once in my inner sanctum, he glanced around with interest. Had he not wandered in here while I'd been gone getting the groceries? Maybe he hadn't. Maybe he'd taken my order to "stay" quite literally and remained in the living room the whole time. Blue was looking intently at my unmade bed. His hand dipped down to touch the pillows. He seemed intrigued by their softness. He pulled back the comforter and felt the mattress. "Sleeping place?"

"Yes."

His eyes lit up at that. "Comfortable."

"Usually. There are different kinds of beds." I thought of the rock-hard mattress I had in college and winced. I climbed between the covers and motioned for him to join me.

He slid in beside me and pulled the covers up, running his hand over the top of them and marveling at their smoothness. "You have blankets back home?" I asked.

"Not like this. Heat control."

"Oh." No matter how warm or comfortable the air felt, I couldn't imagine sleeping without my thick, fluffy blankets.

He shuffled over beside me.

Pressed against me, he felt completely human. A long line of warm, muscled, human flesh. I knew he wasn't, but in that moment, it really didn't seem to matter.

He pulled me even closer and ran a hand down my bare back. For a moment it seemed like he would continue, then his hand froze in place, as if he'd suddenly forgotten something.

"Cand-ice," he said haltingly. "Do you have a...a mate?"

So that was it. I'd asked, but he hadn't. "No," I told him truthfully. "I had a boyfriend."

He stared at me uncomprehendingly then tapped the side of his head. Apparently, his translator didn't have an answer for that one.

"Kind of a casual mate," I told him. "Not a life partner."

"Oh."

Blue fell silent for another moment while I waited for him to continue what he'd been doing. When he didn't, I looked up in question.

"This casual mate...he is gone now?"

Ah, I thought, suddenly comprehending. It seemed even alien males worried about treading on another's territory. "Long gone."

After hearing that, he continued his efforts in earnest. He moved over me, using his superior strength to force me back against the pillows. With one hand he cupped my breast, kneading gently, bringing every nerve in the area to attention. He lowered his head and his lips continued the torture, sucking until my nipple rose to a hard peak. I moaned loudly. His head came up at the sound.

"That is good?" He sounded so unsure, I nearly laughed.

"Yes, good. Don't forget about the other one."

That made him laugh. He moved his head and I felt the warm wetness of his mouth close around my other nipple, followed by the gentle scrape of his teeth. Hot rivers of sensation ran from my breast to my sex and I bit my lip to keep from groaning aloud again and startling him.

I decided to return the favor. Pushing him away slightly, I raised my head and covered one of his dark blue nipples with my mouth. He tasted more spicy than salty, another reminder of just how foreign, yet familiar, he was. He uttered his own guttural moan at that and stared down at me in amazement. I guessed women on *Ratt Naft Mutt*

didn't do such things. The thought made me want to laugh, but instead I moved to try the other.

Glancing up, I studied his expression. His gray eyes had darkened like storm clouds. I watched as his eyelids closed with a sweep of white-blue eyelashes. His lips parted in passion. "Can-dice," he whispered, then something in his own language.

That sound, so full of passion, brought me back to reality. I placed a hand against his chest.

"Wait a sec."

I'd gotten so caught up in my exploration of a man from another world that I hadn't considered the Earthly practicalities. With my free hand, I groped in the drawer of my bedside table until my fingers closed on the cool foil of a condom wrapper. Blue studied it curiously as I tore it open. His eyes widened in alarm when he saw the roll of latex in my palm.

"To prevent pregnancy and diseases." There really was no delicate way to explain it. He tapped the side of his head, accessing his translator, then looked at it again. Finally, he nodded.

I pushed back the covers and Blue rose to his knees. The size of his erect cock made me pause. Obviously aliens were bigger than humans—or maybe it was just him. Blue seemed to be waiting for me to proceed so I reached for him, marveling at how warm and hard he felt as I rolled the latex down his erect shaft. He seemed to like the feel of my hands on him, so I continued lower to cup his heavy balls in my hand. Breath hissed from between his teeth.

He gripped my shoulders and swiftly pressed me against the mattress once more. Between my legs, I felt his huge erection pressing against my moist opening. No human man I'd ever been with had been so well endowed. I found the gentle pressure of his large cock strangely enticing.

I'd been a little worried about what might come next. He seemed human enough, in a purely biological sense, but what men and women did in private on his planet, well...who knew?

I needn't have worried, because he pressed against me and my body responded. No, more than responded—demanded to be filled. I wrapped my legs around him and muttered a deep gasp as he entered me, filling me completely. The pressure nearly took my breath away. Nothing had ever felt like this…ever!

He pulled out slowly and pushed in deeply again and I bucked against him, angling my hips and taking him deeper still. For several moments we rocked together slowly and silently, savoring the strange yet familiar feel of each other's bodies. Each unhurried slide widened me farther and took him deeper. Each thrust of his huge cock built upon the last until I felt my body tightening, ready for the inevitable release. He quickened his pace, raising himself off me, holding himself up on his arms so he could pump faster and faster. The downy hairs on his chest brushed my nipples as he moved, tantalizing me even further. The increased pace sent me over the edge and I came hard, screaming.

He shouted something in his own language, stiffened then sagged against me. I heard him murmur something else unintelligible then he raised himself on one elbow and looked down into my face.

"Good?"

He looked so worried I nearly laughed again.

"Good," I agreed. He looked vastly relieved.

I pointed out the way to the bathroom and instructed him to get rid of the condom.

As he crossed the floor, I studied him. We'd only known each other a few hours. We could barely communicate. Yet, we'd shared something so intimate...

Strangely, I found I cared deeply for this blue man from another world.

I knew then that I couldn't let him go out tonight, even to search for the parts he needed. If the *Gatt* found him, they'd kill him. I didn't want anything to happen to him, I realized with a painful pang in my chest. How had that happened in such a short period of time?

A glance at the space around the edges of the blinds told me that evening was rapidly approaching. Any moment now, Blue would leave the sanctuary of my bed and go searching for the parts he needed to repair his ship. And as soon as he ventured out, the *Gatt* would be looking for him.

But the *Gatt Catt Kan* wouldn't be expecting *me*. And if Blue could find what he needed here on Earth, surely I could find it for him.

Blue returned and sat beside me, pulling me into him arms. He stared at me with something close to adoration. Like he'd said, it had been a long time since he'd had a chance to think about anything but war. It had been a long time for me too. I glanced at the lacy stockings I'd been wearing the night before. Breaking out of his embrace, I snagged them off the floor and held them up.

For a moment he stared at me uncomprehending, but when I grasped his wrist and moved to tie it to the bedpost, his eyes darkened to a stormy gray. Apparently, women on *Ratt Naft Mutt* knew how to play too.

He let me tie his other wrist to the other bedpost and then search in my drawers for more stockings to tie up his feet. He liked this game, I could tell by his thickening erection. Too bad I was going to have to leave him like that. I glanced at the window again. Night still hadn't fallen just yet. Dusk still lingered, bathing the world in its rosy glow. We still had time.

Starting from the foot of the bed, I began to crawl up his body, licking, sucking and generally tormenting every inch of him as I went. I started with his blue toes and worked up to his muscular calves. He grinned at that. His cock stiffened in anticipation. Another glance showed me he was enjoying it even more than I thought. I felt guilty

then. I didn't want to leave him like this, but what else was I to do? I also didn't want the *Gatt* to get him.

I moved up his legs to the juncture of his thighs. He moaned aloud in anticipation, and louder still when my hot breath caressed his groin and I took the tip of his large cock in my mouth.

I hated to be cruel. I really wanted to continue, to explore the depths of what we could experience together. But I couldn't let him venture out alone and perhaps not come back. Very likely *not* come back, I corrected myself.

So there I was...just like I told you...a blue guy all tied up in my bed. A man from another planet, maybe even another galaxy. And though every cell in my body wanted him desperately, I saw very clearly what I was going to have to do instead.

Regretfully pulling away, I looked up at him. "I really do hate to do this to you..."

His smile faded and his eyes darkened like clouds before a tornado.

"But we're going to have to finish this when I get back."

Chapter Three

Blue stared at me, uncomprehending. Unable to use his hands to tap his head and access his translator, he cocked his head and studied me.

"I don't understand."

Of course he didn't.

"Look," I said. "It's like this. I like you, Blue, and I don't want you to get hurt. The *Gatt* can't kill in the darkness and they won't be expecting me. So why don't you tell me what you need to repair your transmitter and I'll go get it."

"Don't understand," he repeated. "I thought you wanted to..." He let the sentence trail off in embarrassment and glanced down at himself. He was still interested, that much was certain, but his interest was wavering in his uncertainty.

"I do," I told him earnestly. "You don't know how much I'd rather stay here with you."

"Stay with me then. Not your responsibility to get supplies."

"Maybe not, but I'm going anyway. If everything works out okay, we can finish this later." I reached over and tested his bonds. They seemed tight enough.

He sighed and sagged back against the blankets.

I reached over him and grabbed a pen and paper from the nightstand. "Okay, so tell me what you need."

It took longer than I thought to compile the list, pausing for Blue to translate and explain in English. Still, the parts didn't seem too difficult to acquire. So I threw a blanket over him to keep him warm until I returned and headed out.

The darkness was a lot more disconcerting than it had been the night before, now that I knew what lurked in it. Even though Blue had told me that the *Gatt* couldn't use

the death ray after dark, I couldn't stop my imagination from conjuring images of some invisible weapon sweeping through the gloom and stealing the life from me. People passed me on the street talking and laughing, totally unaware of the danger that lurked above.

I made my way to an out-of-the-way shop that carried all kinds of odd surplus materials and was open late. The owner looked at me oddly when I presented my list, but he handed over the goods and took my credit card. Another charge I couldn't afford, and I hoped that none of this stuff was restricted and strange men in black overcoats wouldn't be showing up on my doorstep. But if it got Blue away safely, it would be worth it. I'd deal with the men in black coats later if I had to.

My heartbeat had finally begun to return to normal as I headed back down the street toward my apartment.

I had almost reached the safety of my building's front door and begun to breathe easier when I heard it. A high, whining noise. I glanced at the sky instinctively. For a moment I didn't see anything—then I noticed a dark shadow against the sky, even blacker than the surrounding night. I fumbled for my keys.

The back of my neck prickled. My hand scrabbled wildly in the bottom of my purse, finding my lipstick, my wallet, a scrunchie. The whining behind me increased. I fought back the urge to scream. Finally, my hand closed on the sharp edges of my keys. I yanked them from my purse, ignoring the lipstick that fell to the front step and rolled into the grass.

I bolted up the stairs, not waiting for the elevator and keeping my keys ready in my hand. Almost falling through the door to my apartment, I threw every lock on the door and raced down the hallway to my bedroom. Blue sat on the bed, busily untying himself.

He'd obviously been quite active while I was gone because he'd gotten loose from the bonds on his arms and was in the midst of undoing the last one on his leg when I burst through the doorway. He made a point of ignoring me. "We don't have time for this," I said as I raced over and yanked the last knot free.

"The *Gatt* are outside."

Silver-gray eyes fastened on mine. "Gatt?" I had his full attention now.

"Well, I didn't see them." I was nattering nervously.

He grabbed me by the arms and held me in place. "Gatt?" he repeated anxiously.

"I saw something, dark against the sky. It didn't do anything, but I felt..." How to explain that strange sensation? "Terrified," I finished.

"Gatt," he repeated for the third time, confirming my suspicions. "Shouldn't have tied me up." He looked pretty pissed about it all.

"I wanted to protect you." It sounded lame.

"Can take care of myself," he said, then sighed. "Thank you, but not necessary."

"They shot down your ship," I pointed out, sounding lamer still.

His eyes narrowed at that. "Only destroyed transmitter and some other minor systems. Need parts. That's all." He picked up the bag I'd hastily dropped on the bed, glanced inside and then put it back down while he dressed. "Must go," he said finally.

"I'm coming with you."

He straightened and snatched up the bag. "Not coming." It didn't sound up for discussion.

I reared up to my full height. "I can take care of myself too. And I got your parts. I deserve to come."

"Dangerous."

I motioned to the darkness outside the window and whatever lurked in it. "And that isn't? They'll find me here just as easily. I'm safer with you."

"Don't know about you," Blue insisted. "Yet."

"Look," I said, feeling the conversation veering out of my control forever. "They found my *home*. We're just wasting time here. Let me come with you. Before anyone gets hurt."

Blue looked like he might wade in for another argument. Then he glanced at the window and gripped my arm. "Okay. Come. Do exactly as I say. Keep safe."

I nodded my agreement. "Okay. Let's go."

I followed him out into the humid night. Dark clouds scudded across the black sky, threatening rain again. Again I'd forgotten to bring an umbrella, but in light of the *Gatt* and their mysterious death ray, getting wet seemed a small concern. We kept to the shadows. No sense in advertising my blue companion.

Not far from where I lived, the city thinned as the forest claimed the land. Blue seemed to know where he was going. I followed him, keeping a nervous eye on the sky. The canopy of treetops blocked out the horizon. We kept walking for what felt like forever. Rain began a light mist at first, most of it caught by the leaves. And still we walked when the sky decided to empty itself on us.

Blue came to a stop suddenly, scanning the darkness, his eyes intent on something ahead. I wouldn't have picked out the large lump covered with branches in the darkness, but he strode ahead.

"That's it?" I asked, taking up the rear. "That's your ship?" It didn't seem possible a space-faring craft could be buried under mere leaves and mud.

A blue hand abruptly covered my mouth. "Mmphh!"

"Shh!" Blue's face reared up suddenly in the gloom.

"Why?" I whispered around his hand. "Do you think the -"

"Yes," he answered while his eyes scanned the roof of leaves above us.

That's when I noticed it. A sharp prickling in the air, as if someone had electrified it in a way that had nothing to do with the storm. Hairs on the back of my neck sprang to attention. A sharp pang of worry snuck down my spine to settle uneasily in my stomach.

Blue grasped my shoulder and yanked me forward. He cleared away more of the branches, enough to expose a hint of silver metal. I stared at the shape of a sleek craft buried beneath the leaves.

But before I could open my mouth again, he pulled me forward. On some unseen signal, part of the exposed silver slid open. Blue shoved me inside.

I fell into darkness, hitting my thigh on something hard and unyielding. He darted inside then dragged a few branches over the opening. The hatch slid closed silently.

Lights came on then. I couldn't see from where, but the general level of illumination just increased. Gaping, I looked around me.

The thing I'd whacked my leg against turned out to be a very high-tech console. A black smear showed evidence of where flames had burned through the wiring. Vividly, I imagined him staggering from the ship, ripping at his clothes as they also caught fire. So that's how he'd come to be wandering naked in the rain.

If the memory haunted him, Blue gave no sign. Intent on his task, he placed a finger over his lips, warning me to silence, then lay down beneath the console and began yanking out damaged wires. A chair made of some strange silver material sat in front of the console, the only other thing in the craft. I supposed it reclined for sleeping. The ship wasn't much wider than a compact car—it didn't seem possible it could traverse outer space.

Or maybe, came the sudden thought, it hadn't come from that far away. Maybe there was a mother ship sitting out there somewhere, hiding behind the moon perhaps. Or, I thought, getting more worried by the minute, maybe the mother ship had been destroyed by the *Gatt*.

Way too much to think about, I decided, and sat down where I couldn't do any damage.

Blue was busily tearing out wires, soldering and muttering to himself in his own language. It sounded like cussing, but I couldn't be sure. I suppressed a smile and resolved to stay out of trouble.

Still, it was hard not to fidget when this went on for some time. I leaned back in the chair. My hand brushed the side.

Lights came on as the console came alive.

Blue jumped up, banging his head against the bottom of the console. Cursing in his own tongue, he hooked one long-fingered hand over the side of the board and depressed several buttons. I marveled at how he could punch those buttons without even looking. Rubbing his head, he straightened and glowered at me.

"Sorry."

"Trouble, Can-dice. Promised not to be trouble."

"Sorry," I said again. Didn't look like my apology had been accepted. "Are you nearly finished?"

"Almost." Giving me a nervous look, he ducked beneath the console again. "Stay still."

"Okay." I folded my arms in my lap and sat.

For a moment silence reigned. Then I heard a loud *pop*.

Blue was out from under the console in a second. "Gatt!"

Wrenching me from the seat, he slid into it himself before pulling me back down beside him, wedging me between the armrest and his warm body. "Touch nothing," he warned sternly. His hands flew over the controls. Thin webbing slid from the sides of the chair, binding us together and effectively immobilizing us. Claustrophobic and confined, I fought the urge to squirm.

Momentum threw me hard against Blue as we moved sideways first, then up. Pressed against his muscular body, I couldn't breathe. Something sizzled the air around us. Even though we were protected by the craft's outer skin, I could feel it. I held my breath, waiting for another blow.

View screens flared to life. I caught a glimpse of ground moving swiftly beneath us. Lightning lit up the sky. I couldn't tell if it was from the electrical storm or one of the *Gatt*'s doomsday machines. I shut my eyes and prayed that when it was all over, we'd still be in one piece.

I cracked an eyelid and slid a sideways look at Blue. "Where are we going?"

"Away from *Gatt,*" he answered, then his attention was stolen by another blast of light.

We tumbled through the air, trees rushing by us on the screens. Blue sent the craft diving just below the tree line, presumably trying to evade the *Gatt*. Unable to do anything to help, I shut my eyes again.

The communications equipment crackled to life. A query, muffled and distorted, split the air. It sounded like Blue's language, but I couldn't really tell. The query sounded again, becoming a demand. We were diving again, sweeping between valleys and soaring over treetops with the *Gatt* in hot pursuit.

Another demand. No, an *order*. Blue punched another button and said something terse in his own language. He gave me a quick glance that pointedly said, "Be quiet." I decided now wasn't a good time to ask questions and did as he wished.

Tossed against his warm, muscular body and held there by the webbing, I was squashed flat by the G-force. Flames roared past the view screens. I shut my eyes again, afraid to look.

We soared high into the sky, breaking through the atmosphere and zooming into the blackness of space. I opened one eye and stole a peek. Stars sharp as knife points gleamed in the darkness. Living in the city, I'd scarcely seen the stars, except for the odd times when the clouds shifted and the lights dimmed enough to let one peek through. I had no idea there could be so many... So many different hues of diamond lights.

And that was only what I caught a glimpse of on the screen past the bulk of Blue's blue head.

Then I saw something that made me want to shut my eyes forever. Something so dark, so black, it blocked out the stars. A hulk of something so huge it filled the screen and ate up the sky.

"Gatt?" I squeaked.

Blue grunted something in his own language. I didn't press for clarification. Whatever lurked out there make my heart lurch and fall still. The terror of it stole the breath from my throat. No wonder the rest of the universe ran from these...things.

Blue took evasive action, slamming me so hard against him it felt like we were one body. I squeaked again then the breath was squashed out of my lungs. We moved. Really, *really* moved. On the screen, I saw that huge shadow move as well.

Lightning lit up the vacuum around us. At least it looked like lightning. I felt a concussive blast. More alien voices poured over Blue's communications system. He grunted something else back.

Another bone-jarring, searing streak of light momentarily washed out the screens. I wanted to sink low into my seat, but the webbing and Blue's body kept me from moving so much as a muscle.

More crackling orders in Blue's language. It sounded like more orders, anyway. Orders, for some reason, he didn't seem to want to obey. Another blast of light.

Whoever Blue was talking to, they didn't sound friendly. Or happy. Whatever the orders were, it seemed like he intended to disobey them.

Our small ship rocked. Light turned the sky inside out. The view screen whited-out, then tried to reset itself. For a moment we were blind.

A terse series of orders poured out of the console, yelling now. No mistaking their intentions. Blue was to obey...now!

He turned his head slightly, breathing deeply, his chest muscles straining against the webbing. Gray eyes pleaded with me. "Candace, I am sorry." For once he pronounced my name correctly. His grasp of English seemed to be getting better. I'd barely noticed.

"Sorry? What for?"

"I must take you home with me."

Home? I think I mouthed the word. I couldn't even manage a squeak.

"Back to our mother ship," he clarified. "They are holding the *Gatt* at bay, but they cannot do that long enough for me to take you back to Earth. We must join them and make the jump to light speed."

"Light speed?" My voice rose to octave ranges I didn't know I was capable of. "How will I get back?"

He was silent for a moment and I knew it was bad. "I'm not entirely sure that will be possible."

"Not possible?" I'd certainly found my voice now.

"They are not happy to find me in alien company." Another bolt of light made my eyes tear. "Especially on a one-man craft." Another string of alien commands and curses flooded the console. Blue turned gray eyes on me once more. "I'm not entirely certain I could even get you back home on this ship. We are nearly out of oxygen."

He answered the hail in his own tongue then turned his head slightly back toward me. "I'm afraid we have no choice but to join the ship—now."

I had nearly squeezed out the word "no" when the small craft banked sharply, pushing me harder against Blue. *Impossible to squash my lungs further*, I had a second to think, before the momentum did just that. Another flash of light and the following shock wave made my ears pop. A glance at the view screens showed a giant silver disc looming in space before us. We maneuvered toward the dark maw of an open landing bay, hitting the deck hard. Our small ship skidded. Blue grunted and cursed again in his own tongue.

Behind us came the thick *whoosh* of the bay doors closing, I assumed. Our ship hit something—hard. The crash webbing snapped itself snugger still. I felt the giant ship whose belly we had been swallowed up in sort of...tense.

Then it—jumped. That was the only word for it. My stomach felt the momentum but my brain refused to comprehend. Stars swirled before my eyes. Then everything went black.

Chapter Four

Air, thick like soup, swirled around me. The hiss of a ventilation system came from somewhere in the distance. I coughed, cleared my lungs and tried for a fuller breath of air. Strange smells assaulted my nostrils, the sharp tang of disinfectant mixed with things I couldn't put a name to. The atmosphere still seemed slightly thicker than I was used to, but at least I could breathe.

I remembered crash landing in the mother ship. I remembered stars dancing before my eyes, then nothing else.

"Rack nan daf guc," someone said nearby. They didn't sound friendly.

"Tal raq guf dom," said a familiar voice, adamantly. Blue's voice. Sounded like he was arguing and it wasn't going in his favor.

I cracked an eyelid open, finding myself in a brightly lit room. Rows of beds lined one wall. What looked like medical equipment took up the other. My eyes snapped open. I was lying on one of those narrow cots, covered by a nearly transparent silver sheet. The rest lay empty. I tried to sit up, only to fall back against a hard pillow.

My movement caught the attention of the other two people in the room. Blue turned, fixing me in his gray-hued gaze and starting toward me. I gasped. He didn't look like the naked man I'd found in the rain any longer. He'd dressed in a one-piece uniform that changed color as he moved. Its base shade looked like liquid gold, but it picked up reflections of every other color in the room as he walked toward me. Insignia ran down one arm. Many of them. Whoever Blue really was, it seemed he was a very well-decorated warrior. Even his bearing looked different. He held himself erect, walked with authority. I thought of us entwined in my bed sheets and shied away from him.

He sat on the side of my cot and reached for my hand. I let him take it. "Now Candace, don't be afraid. It's all right." Apparently his translator was working much, much better. To judge by his speech I'd have thought he came from my hometown.

I glanced beyond his shoulder at the taller, even more decorated warrior behind him who stared at me with slate gray eyes. Dark, nearly indigo skin made those eyes glow, giving him a penetrating gaze. He had a bulkier build than Blue, and he wore his white hair cropped close to his skull.

I turned my attention back to Blue. "Where am I?"

"On our ship," he answered. He turned to look at the man behind him who continued to glare in my direction. I read defiance in Blue's rigid body. Whoever this dude was, he wasn't happy to see me. "You were injured," Blue said, turning back to me after a moment. "We crashed in the landing bay trying to escape the *Gatt*."

"Where are the *Gatt* now?" If they were about to shoot us out of the sky, I wanted to know.

"Far behind us. Once we made the jump to light speed, they couldn't track us."

"Light speed," I repeated, trying to get my mind around the concept. That meant I was far – very far – from home.

"But we're going back...right? You're going to take me home."

The man behind us said something unpleasant. Blue made a guttural sound in reply, perhaps the alien equivalent of "Shh!"

"Now Candace," Blue said. "Surely you realize that might be a little complicated."

"Complicated?" I tried to rise from the cot but my weak body wouldn't allow me. Blue put a warm yet restraining hand on my shoulder. I didn't want to stay there. I wanted to leave. I opened my mouth to demand they let me go, then my brain kicked in and started working.

Go where? What exactly was I going to demand? That they let me off at the nearest star where I could catch a commuter spacecraft home?

No, I was out in the middle of deep space. With no way home. And completely at their mercy.

Complicated really didn't describe the situation at all.

"This is a massive star ship," he said, sounding quite reasonable, while I tried to suppress the scream rising up inside me. "It would require large amounts of fuel to return you to Earth, not to mention we have the *Gatt* to consider as well as the safety of our own people and the hundreds of lives on this ship."

The other blue man crossed in front of my cot and stared down at me. "*Rak gon tod*," he barked.

Blue sighed. "And then there's the fact that Earth isn't supposed to know of our existence."

"Then what are you going to do with me?"

The other blue guy snapped something else.

"You're welcome to stay with us," Blue said.

I glanced up at the other man, the Captain I presumed, and met his flat eyes. "Doesn't sound like I'm very welcome."

Blue pinned him with his own threatening glance. If this guy *was* the Captain, it was plain he and Blue didn't get along very well. "It's not that, Candace, really. It's just that you've presented us with an interesting complication."

There was that word again. I'd been reduced to that. A complication.

"I want to go home," I insisted.

"I know," Blue said.

The surly Captain opened his mouth but before he could discuss me further, we were joined by another. A female, I realized. No mistaking that in the silver, multihued jumpsuit. Hers had different markings down the sleeve. The insignia and the glittery material did nothing to disguise the voluptuous figure beneath. She stood a head shorter than Blue, her skin the same azure tone, and she wore her long silver hair

elaborately coiled around her head. She held some kind of palmtop computer. With a disapproving glance at both Blue and the Captain, she pointed the device at me then at the bank of equipment across the room, scrutinizing its readings. So she was a doctor, I decided. She said something authoritative to both Blue and the Captain. The Captain snorted and stalked off. Blue offered her one of his knee-melting smiles. She glowered at him in return, then turned to make her way out of the room. Apparently his charm didn't cut it with the doc, but I felt a spike of jealousy anyway.

"Apparently you're going to be just fine," Blue translated. "But I've been ordered to leave you to rest." He pulled his hand from mine and made a move to stand up.

"No! Don't leave me!"

The doctor turned back toward us. Blue waved her away but she hesitated. "I won't be far. Don't worry, you'll be quite safe here."

I didn't think so. The doctor looked competent enough. I was in one piece, after all, despite our rough landing. Whatever had happened to me, she'd patched back up. The Captain, on the other hand—I didn't trust him one bit.

"I'll be back in a little while," Blue promised.

I opened my mouth to protest, but the doctor pointed her handheld at me. Instantly, I felt my eyes misting over.

* * * * *

I swam back to consciousness feeling like a very long time had passed. When I opened my eyes I realized I was no longer in the sick bay, but in a well-appointed cabin. I sat up cautiously, trying not to moan as every muscle protested. Looking down, I found myself clothed in a silver jumpsuit, much like the one the doctor had been wearing. The lights were somewhat dim in the room but I could still make out what looked like a desk in a nook off to one corner. The desk had a view screen of sorts sitting on top of it. A computer maybe, or access to the communications system. A closet—at least what I guessed was a closet—was the only other thing in the space. Off

to one side I noticed an alcove that led to another room. Sanitary facilities, I hoped, realizing I desperately needed them.

I was about to get up to see to that necessity when I noticed I wasn't the only one in the bed.

Looking down, I found Blue nestled beside me. I sat under a silver sheet, much like the one from the sick bay. He was sprawled on top of the covers, facedown, one lank arm hanging over the side. I tried to sneak out of the bed without disturbing him but as soon as I moved, he rolled over and seized me in his unbreakable grip.

"Blue..."

He sat up and ran a hand over his face. "It's all right, Candace. I convinced them to let you stay with me. But you are under my supervision, you may not go anywhere on the ship without me."

"I need to use the..." I pointed to the nook on the far side of the room.

"Oh." He blushed that deeper shade of blue. "I suppose I don't need to accompany you there."

The room had no door. I guessed Blue's people didn't feel the same about privacy as humans, or perhaps that was just me. You couldn't see the actual facilities from the bed, and the equipment seemed self-explanatory, so I did what I had to and emerged.

I came back and sat on the bed. "Blue, I really want to go home."

"I know." He sat up and leaned against the wall beside me. "Trust me, Candace, I'm doing my best to get you there." He stared up at the ceiling, as if he could see through it into space beyond. "But this is a star ship. It isn't that easy just to turn one around. And even if that could be accomplished, sneaking into Earth's air space undetected is another matter altogether."

"I didn't ask for this," I pointed out cruelly. "You asked for my help."

Blue sighed. "I did. And I am...grateful for your assistance." He gave me a long, searching look. "Among other things."

It was my turn to blush.

"But I also asked you to stay in your apartment and let me handle the repairs to my ship alone."

"You did." I had to admit that much. "I was afraid for you. I wanted to help."

"I know. You have a kind..." He paused searching for the right word. "Spirit," he finished.

"And now the *Gatt* know about Earth. That worries me too. Even if I can't go home, I want to know my home is safe and waiting for me to return. And that it's not in danger of a *Gatt* attack."

"That worries me as well," Blue admitted.

"But you can't just leave my whole planet vulnerable!" I thought of that dark shadow against the sky, the one that could suck the life out of everything it touched, and shuddered.

"I agree that's not the best course of action." Blue looked truly worried. "It isn't your world's fault it's come to the *Gatt's* attention." When I would have seconded that thought, he held up a hand to silence me. "I'm a warrior, not a politician. It's not my decision to make, Candace."

"Since when do politicians determine the business of a star ship?"

Blue gave me a straight look. "Tell me things are different on Earth."

I shook my head. "No, things are pretty much the same on Earth. We have more in common than we think."

"We certainly do," he admitted with a suggestive, sensual smile.

I knew where that smile could take us, but I couldn't allow myself to be distracted. Blue was the only one of his kind that I could talk to, the only one who'd ever been to Earth, the only one who'd seen our beautiful planet and the only one who might understand the billions of lives at stake. "You have to help me, Blue. I can't stay here with you." I looked down at his muscular body barely hidden beneath the contours of

that one-piece golden uniform he wore. "As much as I'd like to. And I can't leave my world unprotected. I have to do something. I have to help my people, my planet!"

His eyes darkened to charcoal gray as he watched my gaze sweep over him. "I will do my best, Candace. There is a tribunal called for tomorrow to discuss the matter."

"You have to let me talk to them!"

He smiled then. "I have suggested just that."

"Will they let me?"

"I don't know, they are still discussing the matter."

"By they I assume you mean the Captain?"

He nodded. "The Captain and our committee back home. We have sent a message explaining the situation."

"If it's up to the Captain, I'm pretty sure he'd deposit me at the next star with a livable planet. I don't think he likes me much."

Blue began to laugh then smothered the sound. "It's not a matter of him liking you, Candace. You're an unexpected..."

"Problem?" I supplied.

He offered me a wry grin. "If you wish, but you're a problem that must be dealt with, along with a great deal of damage to our ship as well as lost time and energy that the *Gatt* have caused us."

I tried to get my mind around how far they must have had to run from the *Gatt* and what it might cost to return, to fortify Earth and how they'd even go about it when our planet wasn't supposed to know of their existence. The logistics of it boggled the mind. "I really can't comprehend what this has cost," I began, "but you just can't leave my planet open to a *Gatt* invasion."

"No one wants to do that. Your civilization isn't quite ready to join the interstellar alliance, but it may be soon. It is possible in the not-so-distant future that humans might become valuable allies. We need to protect that possibility."

"Okay, that's sounds more promising."

"I haven't the authority to promise anything. Be clear about that, Candace. But I'll do everything I can to help you get your chance in front of the tribunal tomorrow."

"Tomorrow," I agreed.

He leaned toward me, drawing me against him. He felt strong, warm and all too human despite the blue skin and the odd material of his uniform.

I pulled him closer, taking in the alien yet not unpleasant smell of him. He'd bathed. I caught the scent of unfamiliar spices and plants, yet the overall effect was pleasing. He smelled like clean air and meadows. Maybe I'd get to see his strange planet with its red sun and black grass. The thought was enticing and terrifying at the same time. If I went home with Blue, that meant I wouldn't be going home to Earth.

The terror faded as his lips covered mine. Warm and feathersoft, they forced my mouth open and I tasted him. He'd likely brushed his teeth too, because my tongue tingled from some kind of antiseptic as he swept his over mine, reminding me of all we'd done in my bedroom.

He seemed intent on returning the favor as he pushed me backward into the bed and covered me with his body. Supporting himself with his arms, he pressed against me. I felt my body softening, my mind insisting I leave worries for tomorrow.

I reached up, circling his neck with my arms, yanking him closer still. He laughed against my mouth. "Candace," he murmured. He kissed me again, a deep, probing kiss, as if it could be the last time we might do this. For a moment I wondered what would happen to him now that he'd returned to the mother ship. Would they send him off again into deep space, leaving me in the company of aliens?

I was about to ask him when he pulled away from me and continued his erotic onslaught. He spread the zipper-like clasps on my jumpsuit and feathered my shoulders with tiny kisses. So they *did* have zippers, or at least something like them, I mused distantly. Leaning up, I pushed him to his side and inched the zipper on his

flight suit down, trailing a line of kisses from the center of his downy chest, down over his flat abs to the bulge of his erection.

Blue took the hint and pulled my zipper down farther as well, pushing the material aside and covering the peak of one breast with his mouth. I let my head fall back against the pillow. I almost moaned aloud as he moved to tongue the other. Quickly, I smothered the sound. I didn't want anyone passing in the corridors to wonder what we were doing.

Blue chuckled. He opened my jumpsuit completely, following the path of the zipper with kisses until he reached the edge of my panties.

His head came up. "Not going to tie me up this time?" he asked.

It was my turn to laugh. "No. You ruined my pantyhose."

"Perhaps I should return the favor..."

"You wouldn't!" The thought of being tied up in his cabin where any of his shipmates might stumble across us horrified me.

It must have shown on my face because he said, "Just joking. You know..."

"Teasing?" I supplied.

"Teasing," he repeated, with that inward look he got when he seemed to be adding a new word to his vocabulary, or maybe to his translator. "Yes, teasing...like this..."

He eased the jumpsuit off my shoulders and down over my hips, pulling it free and tossing it aside. Once he'd freed me of the confining material, he continued his teasing with little kisses and nips until his lips met the elastic of my panties. I felt the scrape of his teeth as they gripped the elastic and began to pull them down.

"Blue," I breathed, not sure whether I wanted him to continue or wanted him to stop. I was alone on an alien ship. I might have to stay here forever, alone, the only one of my kind. Then again, if I could convince the tribunal to let me go home, it might be the last time I saw Blue...ever!

Rationalizations stopped as Blue pulled my panties down my legs, baring me to his gaze. I kicked them away and glanced into his heated eyes. It wasn't the first time he'd seen me, but it was the first time he'd taken such a leisurely perusal, as if he was thinking the same thing I was, that it might be the last time we were together.

"You are a wonder," he whispered. "I'd never imagined there could be women more beautiful than my own species." He ran his warm hands up over my calves to my thighs and continued up over my waist as if he were mapping the contours of my body. "So smooth, so pale. So lovely." He curled a lock of my blonde hair around his finger, seemingly marveling at the color and texture.

His hands slid back down to grip my thighs. Gently, he parted them and then lowered his head to brush his lips over my clit. The feathersoft caress made me smother another groan. I felt his warm hands slide around to grip my buttocks as he raised me closer still to those sensual lips.

I moaned aloud at the first slow slide of his tongue. Where had he learned to do that? He'd confessed to monitoring radio and television broadcasts. Just what had he been watching? Or maybe women from *Ratt Naft Mutt* weren't so different.

One more slide of his tongue and I stopped caring where he'd gotten his education and just relaxed into his strong grip. He was still fully clothed while I was fully naked. I found the juxtaposition oddly erotic. Not to mention the sinful caress of his tongue.

Blue renewed his onslaught, tonguing my clit until my body tightened under his exquisite torture. I tried not to moan again and alert anyone passing by in the corridor, and failed. I felt his warm breath against my sensitive flesh as he chuckled at my efforts. The caress of his tongue made my entire body clench. Tension shattered into pleasure.

It took me a moment to catch my breath. Blue pulled himself up my body and kissed me deeply. I tasted an odd mixture of his unique alien musk and myself. The desire in his eyes took my breath away and, my hands straying to the zipper of his uniform, I pulled it all the way down.

He wasn't wearing underwear, I noted, as his cock sprang free. He stood to step out of the uniform then bent to retrieve something from one of the pockets before returning to the bed. At first it looked like a clear pill—but when he placed it against the head of his cock, it spread into a transparent membrane.

"Protection," he said, his voice husky.

Way better than the foil packets we had back home. I wondered if he'd let me take some back with me.

I wrapped my arms around him as he pressed his long frame gently down on top of me. I spread my legs, allowing him to ease his cock deep inside me. This time I was ready for the delicious pressure of his hard length. Whatever his *protection* was made of, its texture was far better than the latex I was used to. It felt as smooth and warm as his own skin.

He probed deeper, making me arch against him. I felt my body responding, greedily wanting more. Blue seemed to want more as well because his rhythm increased with each enticing stroke. His lips covered my mouth, muffling my moans, his tongue mimicking his body's movements. I grasped his taut buttocks, pushing him even harder against me, creating delightful friction. It was all my body needed. My inner muscles gripped him hard as another orgasm hit. Giant, crashing waves of pleasure rolled over me. Blue moaned against my mouth. He arched back as he came, his cock buried to the hilt, his eyes shut and every muscle straining. Groaning low in his throat, he collapsed against me.

We lay still for a moment, neither of us wanting to say anything and ruin the moment. This might be my life here on this star ship, I thought. Life with Blue wouldn't be so bad, assuming he *wanted* a life with me. He hadn't said he did. He hadn't said much of anything at all in that regard. Without Blue, what would I do on an alien ship, or an alien world?

Blue rolled to his side. Once free of my body, the alien condom dissolved back into its clear pill form. He tossed it into a disposal container that must have been motion activated because it emerged from a section of wall when his hand passed over it and then disappeared. Propping himself up on one elbow, he stared at me for a moment then he ran his hand down the length of my body. "Candace..."

He let my name trail off into silence and for a moment I really worried that it might turn out as I feared—that he might not want me. Then he said, "Whatever happens tomorrow, know that I will take care of you."

I looked up into those silver eyes and saw my worried expression reflected there. "Will they let you?"

He laughed at that. "I am not without *some* influence."

How confident, how human he sounded. How very male. "Perhaps," I agreed. "But that doesn't mean the proceedings will go as we hope they will."

Blue was busy tracing the contours of my body, as if memorizing its shape. "If they don't I will never stop fighting, either to keep you with me or to return you to your home."

"Thank you," I breathed. I went back to exploring his body and hoped that tomorrow wouldn't be the last time I saw him.

Chapter Five

Having no idea how they reckoned time on the star ship, I had to rely on Blue to tell me when we were expected at the tribunal. In the featureless metal interior of his quarters, I couldn't tell how much time had passed.

"It's time," he said, finally. "We must make ourselves presentable for the tribunal."

The sonic shower took some getting used to but I felt clean when I emerged. A clean sliver one-piece jumpsuit awaited me on the bed. Food awaited me on a small table near the bed, some kind of bland biscuit-type thing, but it quelled my growling stomach and stayed down. Blue had disappeared somewhere while I showered, but he returned just as soon as I finished dressing, wearing a clean uniform of his own.

Together we walked down the corridor. No guards came to escort me. That much felt reassuring.

"Where are we going?" I asked, trying to calm my twisting stomach and my trembling knees.

"We're walking toward the center of the ship," he said, confirming my suspicions. I had the feeling we were moving inward, though I'd long since lost my direction in the winding corridors. "That's where the council chambers are. That way they have the protection of the rest of the ship."

"In case of attack?"

He nodded. "In case of any unexpected developments."

That didn't sound too reassuring.

We came to a silver sliding door that towered over our heads. Alien symbols I couldn't read scrolled across the double doors. Didn't matter if I could read the alien

script or not, it looked imposing, like this was a place where serious things were discussed in desperate times.

The doors whooshed open as we approached. Silver seats seemed to rise from the floors, as though they'd been crafted in one piece from the same alloy. Uniformed men and women filled the seats in a sea of golden cloth and varying shades of blue skin. Their silver eyes roamed over me, evaluating, judging. I shrank against Blue's side.

"Don't be afraid," he whispered for my hearing alone.

I tried not to be and failed.

Blue led me to a dais at the center of the circular chamber. Beside us stood another dais. The Captain stood there looking grim.

Alien words boomed from overhead speakers as we took our places. Calling the meeting to order, I guessed.

A hologram flickered to life. More figures appeared behind the Captain in its beam. More serious, important-looking figures.

"Representatives of the home world government," Blue told me. "It's customary to bow." I followed his lead. It seemed to please the grim-looking assembly.

The Captain spoke at some length. I couldn't understand any of it. No one translated. Following the Captain's speech, the home world representatives asked questions, I guessed. Blue answered. Again, no one said anything to me. Things were decided, it seemed, yet I had no inkling what they were.

I couldn't tell how much time had gone by. No clocks lined the walls of the chamber. It felt like at least an hour. An hour while I was discussed and plans for my future were made. Without my input.

Finally, I could stand it no more.

"Wait!" I said. The word echoed through the council room. Whether they understood the word or not, everyone turned to stare at me, even the holograms. I looked at Blue. "Isn't anyone going to tell me what's going on?"

By the glares I got, I gathered explaining anything had to be a great imposition. Blue glanced at the leaders from the home world. From the way their smoky gray eyes blazed in their blue faces, I could tell they were annoyed. Eventually, one of the home world reps nodded in Blue's direction.

"It's been decided," Blue said, turning toward me. He looked very nervous. Whatever it was, he really didn't want to tell me. "It's been determined," he began again, "that it is too expensive and time-consuming, not to mention dangerous, to return you to your planet. The last thing we want to do is to draw any more of the *Gatt's* attention to Earth."

"No!"

That I might disagree apparently hadn't occurred to them.

More words in their alien language were spoken. "No!" I repeated, louder, more forcefully. "You can't leave Earth alone and unattended. I can help!"

Vehement disagreement broke out. I didn't need to understand their language to get that. Blue looked acutely uncomfortable.

"Let me talk to them," I pleaded.

Blue relayed my request. Another announcement echoed through the room.

"They have agreed to hear your request," Blue said. "The translators have been engaged."

I glanced at the blue-skinned assembly and the holograms from their far-off planet and took a deep breath. "I know I am only one human," I began. "And I'm one human with knowledge of your world and your civilization that I shouldn't have." That much they seemed to agree with. "But you can't leave my corner of the universe unattended. I know my planet doesn't seem like much...yet. But we hold a great deal of promise. Earth *does* matter to the future of the galaxy!"

Before they could disagree, I held up my hand.

"Someone needs to keep an eye on what's happening in our little section of the universe. In case the *Gatt* come back, someone needs to be watching. Someone needs to carry out surveillance."

I could tell I had their attention now.

"So I'm asking...give me the tools to be that person."

I waited while the delegates from the home world discussed me some more in their own language. The translators might have been on, but apparently not working in *my* direction. They might be able to understand me but they obviously didn't want me to understand what they said.

Eventually the conversation fell silent. Some decision had been made. But before they could declare what that was, I scanned the row of delegates—taking care to meet their eyes—and said, "Return me to my home planet. Give me the technology to watch the skies and communicate with you. Let me be your eyes in my solar system."

My plea provoked another round of angry discussion. The delegates on the home world spoke most vehemently against my proposal. At least that's how it seemed to me. I had no idea what they were actually saying but they sure sounded outraged.

The heated argument went on for some time. Blue's shipmates weighed in on the matter. The Captain seemed to have volumes to add to the debate.

Finally, Blue held up his hand. No one noticed. The discussion raged on. He raised his voice and said something clipped in his own language. The arguing fell silent.

He spoke again, calmly, rationally.

Again, silence.

"What?" I hissed, when the quiet had stretched long enough to give me ulcers. "What's going on?"

Blue turned toward me. Trust and warmth blazed in his liquid-silver eyes. "I vouched for you," he said softly. "I told them I trusted you...with my life. I told them you had taken me in, hidden me. I told them you went for supplies, that you helped me.

I told them you could be trusted with our secrets. That they could depend on you...as I do."

His words moved me. I'd had men tell me all kinds of things, but no one had ever put their life in my hands like that. "So, are they going to let me go?"

His expression darkened. "More discussion is needed."

"But they've—"

He held up a hand to silence me. I looked up to see all the delegates looking in my direction. Probably they had their translators engaged now, eavesdropping on our every word.

The Captain uttered a rapid string of words in his own language.

"Come," Blue said. "We can await their decision in my quarters."

I thought of what we'd been doing in his quarters while we waited earlier and blushed. Hopefully, they didn't know what that embarrassed flush meant.

Down the curving hallways we went again. The door to Blue's quarters whooshed open. I stepped inside.

He entered behind me, filling the small room. I heard another whoosh as the door closed. Then his lips covered mine.

With lips as soft as down, he teased my mouth open. I returned his kiss, vividly aware this might be the last time we saw each other. An unexpected gift of time. Loss loomed on either side of the decision. Even if they made me stay on *Ratt Naft Mutt*, that didn't mean I'd ever see Blue again. If they sent me home, well—this was likely goodbye.

We were moving, I realized, as he backed me farther into the room, stopping when the backs of my legs met the side of the bed. I let him ease me down and cover my body with his.

'His warm hands eased my fight suit open and slipped it down over my shoulders. I tensed, ready for another onslaught of his sensual perusal.

A buzzer sounded through the room. I jumped and my head flew up, smacking my forehead against Blue's. He winced, I yelped. The buzzer sounded again, followed by what had to be a query.

Blue leapt to his feet and punched a button on the desk console. He answered the hail.

A burst of words issued forth at a rapid fire from the speaker. When they ended, another voice asked what sounded like a question. Blue turned to me.

"A decision has been made."

"Okay," I said cautiously.

"They are willing to spend the money and fuel and risk discovery to send you home—if you are still willing to be our sentry in your solar system."

"Yes!" I said a little too enthusiastically. "I get to go home!"

I glanced at the speaker, embarrassed. They'd probably understood that too. "There's more, right?"

"Right."

Another query from the intercom. Blue said something back. "They want to make me your liaison."

"That's good, right?" I wasn't so sure all of a sudden. I'd wanted to go home. I'd wanted to see Blue again. I hadn't really thought about what *he* wanted. "Do you *want* to be my liaison?"

He smiled then. He said something curt into the intercom then shut it off. Crossing the room, he sat down beside me. "They're effectively making me responsible for you."

"They're making you responsible for making sure I behave, that as soon as your backs are turned I don't run right out and sell your story to the tabloids."

"I have no idea what that means, but essentially yes. They're putting me in charge of making sure you do the job you agreed to...if you agree to it."

"You can trust me, Blue," I said, looking deeply into his eyes. "You can trust me with the secrets of the universe. I won't tell. I'll use your surveillance equipment to watch the solar system and keep Earth safe. Just in case the *Gatt* come back."

He looked vastly relieved at that.

"But my question is...do *you* want the job?"

"Candace-"

"No, really. I know how much you love the warrior's life. Do you really want to be my babysitter?"

"You're hardly a baby," he said, giving me a thorough once-over, his gaze lingering appreciatively on my open jumpsuit. "And I'll need my skills as a warrior if the *Gatt* ever return to Earth."

I pulled him close and kissed him hard. "You sure will."

Another thought occurred to me. "But how will you disguise yourself on Earth? You can't walk around looking...well, blue."

"We have compounds that can dye our skin. On occasion I've had to use them in order to engage in undercover operations among other species."

The reality of Blue's military past was really starting to sink in. I thought of him flying to distant worlds, performing undercover maneuvers. I must have looked very serious because he smiled to put my worries at ease. "But those compounds aren't the kind of thing you want to use a lot of. So, most of the time, I'll have to stay hidden inside."

I laughed then. "That's okay. I think we can come up with a few things to do to pass the time."

His grin told me we were thinking the same thing.

"That's it?" I asked. "No hidden clauses that say I have to submit to a probe?"

His glance turned inward as he waited for the translation. Then he laughed. "No probe. That's all."

"Then tell them I accept, so we can get back to what we started."

He gave me a long, lingering kiss then moved to the intercom to relay my message.

After a short conversation, it was done.

So what now? I thought as he turned back toward me and closed the space between the console and the bed. His grin widened as he approached. Reaching into the pocket of his flight suit, he brought out a pair of what could only be high-tech handcuffs. Even though they were made of some very thin form of metal, they still looked effective. He pressed a button and they sprang open. I shuffled back along the bed until my back hit the wall.

"What are those for?"

His smile widened farther still. "We have a few hours while the ship changes course and prepares to make the jump to light speed. I want to make sure you don't get away from me."

I glanced from the cuffs back to him, remembering how I'd tied him to my bed. But that was for safety's sake. By the look on his face, I deduced he had another idea altogether. "Oh, that's just not fair!"

"Not fair?" he asked mildly. "You tied me up with your stockings. Which was all very exciting—until you left me."

"You managed to free yourself quickly enough."

"Quickly?" He reached for one wrist and snapped a cuff on. "It took me forever to release those knots!"

He snapped the other cuff onto the metal bed frame. Then he slithered down my body and reached for the zipper of my jumpsuit. The hiss of the closure opening sounded loud in the silence of the room. Cool air caressed my skin as the suit opened. Then I felt the hotness of his mouth as it closed over one nipple.

I arched against him, wanting more, but when I tried to move my right hand I was effectively halted by the cuffs.

"No," he murmured softly against my skin. "I'm in control this time."

Immobilized and deprived of the sense of touch with one hand, I happily surrendered to what he intended to do to me. I was happy enough to comply as his hands moved to undo the zipper completely. He eased my left arm from the sleeve and freed my legs, leaving the rest of the material to dangle from my cuffed right arm.

Blue didn't seem to mind being fully clothed as he renewed his onslaught, moving his mouth to tease my other nipple. I grasped his hair with my free hand, pushing him harder against me. He moved beneath my hand, slithering down my torso, tracing it with a line of kisses. He lingered over my bellybutton, swirling his tongue over the sensitive flesh before moving downward. His mouth left a warm, wet trail against my skin in the coolness of the air. I moaned in anticipation of where I knew he was heading.

Hot breath against my crotch made me groan aloud. The feeling of being restrained and erotically tortured was almost too much to bear. I jerked at the first slide of his tongue against my nether lips. I released his hair and gripped the thin blanket as he probed my moist folds, honing in on my clit. He teased the tender nub and I bit my lip as his tongue dipped inside me, tormenting me with the image of what he intended to do with his cock.

My body tensed, primed for the orgasm I could feel gathering. He pulled away from me then. I cried out in frustration, my hand jerking against the cuffs.

He'd said it would take a few hours for the ship to change course. As soon as I was released, I planned to pay him back in kind. I could think of a million delicious ways to torment him.

Blue stripped off his flight suit. I craned my neck to admire his body as he searched in his pockets for another of his self-applying condoms. I *definitely* wanted to take some of those back to Earth. With a rueful sigh, I realized they probably wouldn't be included with the surveillance equipment.

As the clear membrane spread over his stiff cock, I swallowed hard. He seemed more turned on than ever, his erection somehow bigger than before as it jutted toward me.

The bed gave under his weight as he covered me with his warm body. One arm slid beneath my hips, raising them to meet him. Gently, he guided the head of his cock inside me. Absolutely bigger, I thought at the delicious pressure—and I wanted more. He pulled out quickly for a longer, harder thrust. I arched against him, pushing him deeper, taking all of his length. Each stroke filled me completely.

I wrapped my legs around his hips, grinding myself against him. He moaned deep in his throat and began to move faster still. I met his pace thrust for thrust. My free hand grasped his taut buttock and the sensation of all that hard muscle flexing beneath my fingers nearly sent me over the edge.

His lips found my mouth, demanding entrance. I tasted his unique spice as his tongue echoed the motions of his cock. Desire coiled tighter, demanding the shattering orgasm I knew was coming. But first I wanted more of him.

His hands slid lower, cupping my buttocks and shoving him even deeper inside me. That extra pressure was all it took. My orgasm hit in waves of pure pleasure.

Blue pulled his mouth away. His breath came in hot pants against my ear. Tension hummed through every muscle. He stiffened, groaning something in his own language as he ground his pelvis against mine, hard, and came.

For a long time we lay entwined, just enjoying the feel of each other's bodies. Finally, he pulled away from me to dispose of the condom and release my hand from the cuff. We lay still, half facing each other, neither of us wanting to voice our fears.

I was taking a man from another world home with me, while dangerous aliens lurked in the dark recesses of space.

"It'll be all right, Candace," Blue said after a moment, guessing the path of my thoughts. "I promise I'll keep you and your world safe."

"Promise again."

He smiled that huge, open smile that I'd so fallen in love with. "I promise. Don't worry."

Silence reigned in Blue's quarters, broken only by the hiss of the ventilation system. I ran the tip of my finger down his nose, tracing the contours of his face. "I dreamt about you."

His smile faded. "That's good, right?"

"No, really. That first night in my apartment, I dreamt we were sitting on this black hill on *Ratt Naft Mutt* beneath a yellow sky and a red sun. There was this triangular building on the horizon," I said, explaining what I recalled of the structure.

He stilled at that. Slowly he turned his head to look me full in the face. "That's strange...I had a similar dream."

A blush crept up my cheeks as I remembered what else we'd done in that dream.

"Is there a place like that on Ratt Naft Mutt?"

"There is. The building you describe is my house. I often sit on the hill beside it to watch the sunset. It's one my favorite places in the whole universe."

I thought of the dream again and how peaceful it had felt there. "How is that possible?"

"I don't know," he said, taking my head in his hands and kissing me softly. "How is it possible that a man from halfway across the galaxy falls in love with a woman from Earth?"

I smiled. "Does it matter?"

That made him laugh. "Doesn't matter to me. There are many mysteries out here in space. I've learned to take miracles at face value when they happen."

"A miracle," I repeated. "I guess we are."

* * * * *

So, here I am, back on Earth. I don't think anyone's the wiser. At least no men in black overcoats have shown up at my door. I'm back at work in my boring old job, except now I have an interesting sideline. When my friends ask how my weekend was, I just smile conspiratorially. I think they suspect there's a man involved, but I refuse to give details.

As for my new sideline...well, it's not the career path I'd had in mind. Especially since I still have to work for a living. Suffice to say, I spend a lot of my off-hours protecting the universe from the safety of my bed...with my blue guy.

The End

About the Author

Multi-published author Piper Leigh had been nominated for numerous awards. She's always had a fascination with the dark and mysterious and enjoys writing about larger than life characters like vampires, ghosts, zombies, angels...and sexy blue aliens.

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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